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AUTHOR Hales, Loyde W.; Shaw, Ian S.
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ABSTRACT

This study sought to investigate the effect of the use of videos about the Holocaust as part of a study of world history on student knowledge and understanding. The research hypothesis was that the mean achievement of 8th grade students who viewed videos about the Holocaust and World War II (WWII) in conjunction with their regular class assignments would be greater than the mean achievement of 8th grade students who did not view the videos but received otherwise similar instruction. This research is based on a pretest-posttest experimental study of 60 students selected at random from a middle-class suburban junior high in the Northwest, with 98% Caucasian enrollment. Teachers were randomly assigned to the two groups; both teachers were experienced and had master's degrees. Both groups used the same text, had the same amount of instructional time, and took the same quizzes and examinations. The only difference was the video group used some of their instructional time to view 10 videos (five documentary; five dramatic) about the Holocaust and WWII during the quarter. Both groups were administered a researcher-developed test prior to instruction and after instruction. The tests were based on the text book. This study supports the view that a careful use of video in classroom instruction in history can impact student knowledge and understanding. Contains 44 references. (EH)

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The Effect of Videos on Student Thinking About the Holocaust in World War II

Loyde W. Hales, Portland State University
Ian S. Shaw, Portland State University

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Objectives

It is widely believed that the medium of videos helps enhance learning in the general area of social studies, and more specific in regard to examining conflict between nations and questions regarding war and peace. Videos are seen as providing a conduit to students, helping them to narrow down their perspectives of a specific historical event, while providing a strong visual complement to the words, diagrams, statistical data, and still pictures that are commonly presented in history textbooks. Videos have the potential of freezing time and events into a vicarious experience of moments of history that affect mankind for years to come. One such central historical event, the primary focus of this study, that truly affected the Twentieth Century was the Holocaust. The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of the use of videos about the Holocaust as part of a study of world history on student knowledge and understanding. In particular, the research hypothesis was that the mean achievement of 8th grade students who view videos about the Holocaust and WWII in conjunction with their regular class assignments will be greater than the mean achievement of 8th grade students who do not view the videos but otherwise receive similar instruction.

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Perspectives

World War II impacted both the western and eastern hemispheres on a scale never before experienced in human history. The political, economic and social institutions of this world, and the many problems associated with them, are firmly linked to this time in history. A study of the WWII period, with particular attention to the Holocaust, should not only provide a means of helping students better understand their world (Schwartz, 1990; Tritt, 1985), but also provide an opportunity for moral and ethical development (Bialystok, 1986; Farnham, 1983; Rabinsky & Danks, 1989; Wells & Wingate, 1986). It can be used as a means of examining prejudice and racism (Fine, 1991; Gabelko, 1988; Holt, 1992; Kessler, 1991; Kunczt, 1993; Wells & Wingate, 1986), exploring human rights issues (Farnham, 1992; Flaim, 1989), and encouraging introspection and critical thinking (Cameron, 1986; McDaniel, 1989; Wells & Wingate, 1986; Wurzel, 1984). However, special interest groups have disrupted attempts to deliver curricular programs that address human rights issues, including the Holocaust (Flaim, 1989). For example, the Department of Education refused to fund programs that addressed the Holocaust (1986-1988), in one review citing the failure of the program to present the Nazi viewpoint as a critical factor in the decision (House Committee on Government Relations, 1988). This, despite a previous statement by the House of Representatives in 1986 that public schools should include a study of the Holocaust in their history curricula (House

Committee on Education and Labor, 1986). Many states, including Ohio (Rabinsky, 1989) and South Carolina (South Carolina State Department of Education, 1992) not only encourage the study of the Holocaust but provide resource guides and material which can be used by teachers. Nevertheless, since 34 states do not require world history classes (Schwartz, 1990), the most likely place in which this topic is likely to be addressed, it is probable that the most students do not seriously examine the Holocaust during their public school years.

However, for most high school students, WWII is only an imperceptible step away for ancient history and holds little more relevance than the conquests of Alexander the Great. Research suggests that students' knowledge of this war is poor, particularly in regard to the Holocaust. Secondary schools need to include a study of the Holocaust in their curricula (Borth, 1983). If war and genocide are to be rejected as unthinkable as a means of resolving ethnic and national conflicts and hostilities, then it is vital that students understand the tragedy and suffering these cause. In a cross-cultural study (McRoy, 1982), it was found that both British and U. S. secondary school students have some understanding of the Holocaust, with the British exhibiting greater understanding; this is likely associated with more formal instruction on the topic. McRoy suggested that this understanding can be enhanced by using Holocaust curricula which stresses the interplay of psychological and historical factors in genocide . Also, Morse (1981) found

that the a study of the Holocaust impacts early adolescent perceptions of self and others. There is evidence to suggest that innovative teaching (Cameron, 1986; Holzman, 1983; Smith, 1989) and the use of videos (McDaniel & Tamra, 1989; Naftali, 1990a) can improve student knowledge can impact student awareness, sensitivity, and perceptions. By focusing on the development of thinking skills, a study of the Holocaust can reduce prejudice and increase the self-esteem of 10th grade students (Gabelko, 1988). It would appear that videos can act to sensitive students and make events more relevant by providing a strong visual complement to the words, diagrams, and statistical data commonly presented in textbooks, thus freezing time and events into a vicarious experience. However, there has been little research on the effects of video on student learning of historically significant events.

For the educator who wishes to use a study of the Holocaust to help students think reflectively and critically, understand the roots of prejudice and genocide, and develop positive understandings and self-concepts, a nearly unlimited supply of materials and approaches are available. Bibliographic reviews of sources of literature on the Holocaust have been prepared by Cargas (1985), Crawford, et al. (1994), Laska (1990), Naftali (1990b), and White (1991). Muallem and Dowd (1992) criteria for performing a content analysis of books and applies these to six historical novels about the Holocaust. Film sources have been identified, discussed, and, in some cases, evaluated by

Michalczyk (1982), Naftali (1990a), and White (1991). Friedlander (1991) examines the availability and usefulness of various types of documents, including trial records and eyewitness accounts, pertaining to this period; ERIC Digest (Holt, 1992) provides a rationale for Holocaust education and lists organizations and resources that are available. Finally, available curricular guidelines, sometimes with lesson plans and course materials, range from a classroom lesson about Auschwitz (Blondo & Schmael, 1993)and a three-day lesson on the Holocaust (Riley, 1992) to courses of studies used in a relative large number of schools (Fine, 1991, Holzman, 1993, and Heller, 1993, discussions of **Facing History and Ourselves;** Rabinsky's, 1989, **The Holocaust: Prejudice unleashed**, prepared for the Ohio Department of Education; and South Carolina's State Department of Education publication, 1992, **South Carolina voices: Lessons from the Holocaust)**. Suggested approaches and type of materials vary greatly. For example, Kalfus (1990) suggests using primary documents from Germany, having students replace euphemistic terms with words reflecting their intended meaning; references include source materials. Cameron (1986) proposes a multi-disciplinary approach, using tests, documents, films, literature and resource people. The use of videos and films have been advocated and suggested materials suggested, often with lesson plans. For example, McDaniel and Thompson (1989) presents a 14-minute video tape and handout on the Holocaust and the Moore Foundation (1994) provides a 28 minute video on Auschwitz, together with discussion

materials and suggested role playing activities. Certainly, we can also use video and film that is widely distributed within our society; for example, Presseisen and Presseisen (1994) suggest using **Schindler's list**.

Data Sources and Methods

In this pretest-posttest experimental study, prior to the creation of student schedules for the academic year, a random sample of 60 students was selected from the 180 8th grade students in a suburban junior high school in the Northwest. This middle-class school was 98% Caucasian. Students were randomly assigned to the two treatment groups (classes); both classes met second period (9:39-10:29). Teachers were randomly assigned to treatment groups. Both teachers were experienced and had master's degrees.

Both groups used the same text, had the same amount of instructional time, and took the same quizzes and examinations. The text used was **World history--Perspectives on the past**, published by Heath and Company in 1990. The only difference was that the video group used some of their instructional time to view 10 video films (five documentary; five dramatic) about the Holocaust and WWII during the quarter. The films used included: **Shoah**, using a series of contemporary interviews with victims of the Holocaust; **Genocide**, showing the brutal, sadistic and terrifying nature of the death camps; **Night and Fog**, a French documentary shot on location in the death camps, interspersed with film shot by the Nazis to document their handiwork; **The**

Eighty-first Blow, produced in Israel by survivors of the Holocaust; **The World at War: Genocide, 1941-1945**, using documentary film footage; **Shop on Main Street**, a dramatic film of how a Czechoslovakian family handled the "Aryanization" of the Jewish property in their village (Academy Award, 1965); **The Garden of the Finzi-Continis**, a dramatic film focusing on an Italian Jewish family; **The Assault**, recreating life in occupied Holland (Academy Award, 1987); **Au Revoir les Enfants**, a dramatic film based on true experiences of Jewish families in a French village; and **Wannesee Conference**, a German dramatic film which addresses the "Final Solution."

Both groups were administered a researcher-developed test prior to instruction and after instruction. The tests were based on the text book; questions from the tests provided by the publisher were examined and used/modified as deemed appropriate. The same test was used as a pretest, administered during the third week of school (just prior to the start of the unit of study), and posttest, administered at the close of instruction, one week before the end of the term. To examine achievement within treatment, a dependent t-test was applied to the pretest and posttest scores of each group separately. To test the primary null hypothesis, an analysis of variance and covariance was used, with the pretest serving as the covariate.

Results and Conclusions

Descriptive statistics for both groups on the pretest and posttest are presented in Table 1. The pretest and posttest

means for the video group were 81.0 and 85.2, respectively; for the control group, the means were 77.0 and 80.9, respectively. The standard deviations for the video group were 4.7 (pretest) and 8.0 (posttest); for the control group, they were 7.5 (pretest) and 6.6 (posttest).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Treatment Groups

Group	Test	Mean	Standard Deviation	Median	Maximum Score	Minimum Score
Video	Pretest	81.0	4.7	81.0	89	71
	Posttest	85.2	8.0	86.0	100	70
Control	Pretest	77.0	7.5	77.5	88	61
	Posttest	80.9	6.6	82.0	90	68
Total	Pretest	79.0	6.5	80.0	89	61
	Posttest	83.0	7.6	84.0	100	68

The null hypothesis that there was no difference between the pretest and posttest means of the video group was rejected at the .05 level of significance ($t = 2.45$; $p = .02$). The null hypothesis for the control group was also rejected ($t = 2.18$; $p = .04$). In both cases, the posttest mean was greater than the pretest mean, indicating that students did demonstrate achievement during the quarter under both instructional conditions. [See Table 2.] However, the statistical hypothesis

that the two treatment groups, at pretesting, were from the same population was rejected ($t = 2.51$; $p = .02$). The pretest mean for the video group was greater than the pretest mean for the control group.

To test the research hypothesis, a covariance was performed. The statistical hypothesis was rejected ($F = 4.411$; $p = .04$). The adjusted posttest mean for the video group was greater than the adjusted posttest mean for the control group. [See Table 3.]

Table 2. Independent and Dependent t-Tests for Within and Between Group Comparisons

Group	N	Pretest	Posttest	df	Related t	p
Video	30	81.0	85.2	29	2.45	.02
Control	30	77.0	80.9	29	2.18	.04
Independent t*		2.51	2.28			
df		48.70	56.10			
p		.02	.03			

*Used separate variances in calculating the standard error of the difference between means. Contrasts groups on pretests and posttests separately.

Table 3. Analysis of Variance Using the Pretest as Covariate

Source	SS	df	MS	F	p
Treatment	242.284	1	242.284	4.441	.04
Pretest	1.410	1	1.410	0.026	.87
Error	3130.857	57	54.927		

It would appear than the use of video films contributes to greater student understanding. However, it should be noted that the pretest was not a significant covariate. This is particularly surprising since the same test was used as both a pretest and a posttest. Although this could indicate a problem in test reliability, the stability of the difference between the two groups from pretest to posttest tends to negate this explanation. An examination of the standard deviations of the groups on the tests indicates an unusual pattern that might provide a clue as to this failure to obtain a significant covariate. Despite some students hitting the ceiling on the posttest and mean increasing to about 85%, the standard deviation nearly doubled from pretest to posttest (4.7 to 8.0) for the video group. In contrast, the standard deviation of the control group decreased from pretest to posttest; given the change in the means, this was more what we would expect. Although the means of both groups increased by about the same amount, the video became considerably more heterogeneous, while the control group became slightly more homogeneous.

It is possible that the intense, horrifying, dramatic impact of the video/films overwhelmed and stressed some students, resulting in little or negative change in test performance, while stimulating and motivating other students to greater understanding -- thus spreading out the students. Nevertheless, a net increase in learning of approximately the same magnitude occurred in both groups.

As is likely, if the students discussed the videos/films at home with their parents and siblings, parental responses could have influenced student perceptions -- negatively, if parents denied the Holocaust or emotionally opposed the study of it, and positively, if they perceived this as a desirable learning experience. In fact, as was subsequently discovered, some parents in this rather conservative community were so outraged that they protested to the school board. Very likely, some children experienced increased difficulty on the posttest as a result of the conflicting messages to which they were exposed .

Educational Importance

As a nation and world, we are beset with racial and ethnic strife. Although education can not eliminate these problems, it does offer one avenue for helping people develop greater understanding of themselves and others. Student understanding of history has been viewed as a means of leading students to greater understanding and thus greater acceptance of self and others. Many would question whether this has happened. However, if significant historical events can be made real to students, perhaps behavioral changes as a result of knowledge will occur. The use of videos in the study of dramatic historical events offers some hope of this change occurring. This study supports the view that a careful use of video in classroom instruction in history can impact student knowledge and understanding. Curricula have been developed which make use of videos concerning

the Holocaust; this study suggests that the integration of videos into instruction may be advantageous.

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